

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4688

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 CARACAS 6500

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR ENRG EGEN

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN ECONOMIC NATIONALISM: BREAKFAST
CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ

REF: STATE 126784

SUMMARY-IN LENGTHY INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ, WE
DISCUSSED DIFFERING VIEWS AS TO HIGH PRICES OF PETROLEUM AND HOW
MANY BARRELS OF OIL IT TOOK TO BUY A U.S. TRACTOR. THE PRESIDENT
SAID THAT IF HE SERVED VENEZUELA'S TRUE INTEREST, HE WOULD CUT
THE PRODUCTION OF PETROLEUM IN HALF BUT INSTEAD HAD GIVEN
INSTRUCTIONS THAT VENEZUELA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND PART-
ICULARLY TO THE UNITED STATES SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE MET BY NOT SO
REDUCING PRODUCTION. HE HOPED SOME AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED WITH
COLOMBIA WHICH WOULD PERMIT EXPLORATION FOR OIL IN THE GULF OF
VENEZUELA. AS FOR IRON AND OIL CONVERSATIONS, A SETTLEMENT
REACHED IN THE FORMER WOULD PROBABLY SET A PRECEDENT FOR THE
LATTER. I HAD IMPRESSION THAT PRESIDENT PEREZ HAS NOT RPT NOT
MADE UP HIS MIND AS TO WHAT THE FINAL ARRANGEMENT WILL BE MADE
IN NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FOREIGN OIL COMPANIES, BUT HE DID
SAY CLEARLY THAT FOR PETROLEUM A PATTERN WOULD BE ESTABLISHED

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IN THE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE IRON ORE COMPANIES; AND I HAD

THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS OWN THINKING TRENDS TOWARDS SERVICE CONTRACTS, A HIGH DEGREE OF TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFER AGAINST REIMBURSEMENT, AND SOME FORMULA FOR A GREATER VENEZUELAN PARTICIPATION IN MARKETING. END SUMMARY

I WENT TO LA CASONA AT 8 O'CLOCK THIS MORNING AND HAD AN HOUR AND A HALF BREAKFAST CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIENT OF VENEZUELA, DURING WHICH I MADE THE POINTS AS SET OUT REFTEL. THE FOLLOWING IS AGENERAL REPORT OF HIS VIEWS; A SEPARATE TELEGRAM WILL COVER CUBA.

I.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN US-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS RE PETROLEUM AND IRON

1. THE PRESIDENT EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT OUR RECENT DEMARCHES IN WASHINGTON AND CARACAS OVER THE PRICE OF PETROLEUM. HE ASKED IF I HAD YET RECEIVED THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT'S REPLY, TO WHICH I RESPONDED IN THE NEGATIVE. HE SAID HE THOUGHT THE FONMIN WOULD BE CALLING ME IN NEXT MONDAY TO GIVE ME THE GOVERNMENT'S ANSWER. AS I ANTICIPATED, THE PRESIDENT REITERATED HIS SATISFACTION THAT AFTER MANY, MANY YEARS VENEZUELA WAS AT LAST RECIVING A GOOD PRICE FOR ITS OIL. HE CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT SO FAR AS THE U.S. CONSUMER WAS CONCERNED, THE ACTUAL COST OF VENEZUELAN OIL WAS NOT OVER \$14 A BARREL AS INDICATED BY THE TRV FIGURES BUT CLOSER TO \$10 A BARREL, AND WITH THIS I AGREED. HOWEVER, I WENT ON TO EXPLAIN THAT, LIKE VENEZUELA, WE WERE A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY AND HAD TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT PUBLIC OPINION WHICH WAS VEXED BECAUSE OF THE HIGH COST OF VENEZUELAN OIL. MY GOVERNMENT ALSO FELT IT NECESSARY TO INFORM THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT OF ITS FEELING THAT THE COST OF PETROLEUM WORLD-WIDE WAS TOO HIGH AND THAT SHOULD SUCH A CONDITION PERSIST, WE HAD GRAVE FEARS FOR A WORLD-WIDE DEPRESSION.

2. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT WE WERE IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE AND HOW TO BREAK OUT OF IT WAS THE PROBLEM. AS SEEN THROUGH VENEZUELAN EYES, ONE HAD TO ASK THE QUESTION, "HOW MANY BARRELS OF PETROLEUM DOES IT TAKE TO BUY A TRACTOR?"

3. I REPLIED THAT AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA
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HAD MORE WIDE SWEEPING POWERS TO FIX PRICES THAN HAD THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. BACKED BY AN ALMOST UNANIMOUS POPULAR FEELING AND BY THE VOTE OF THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS, PRESIDENT PEREZ HAD IN FACT FULL POWERS TO FIX PRICES AND TO CONTROL THE ECONOMY. THIS WAS MORE THAN HAD PRSIDENT NIXON IN WASHINGTON. HE COULD NOT DECREEE LOWER PRICES FOR TRACTORS NOR COULD, IN OUR FREE MARKET ECONOMY, THE US GOVERNMENT FIX THE PRICES OF OTHER COMMODITIES IN SHORT SUPPLY OR SUCH COMMODITIES AS WERE CONTROLLED

BY THE WEATHER, SUCH AS WHEAT AND SOY BEANS. HOWEVER, I DID SAY THAT I WOULD ASK MY GOVERNMENT'S SYMPATHETIC CONSIDERATION OF THE WORLDWIDE PROBLEM OF HOW TO REDUCE PRICES ON BOTH SIDES-- ON THE ONE HAND, THE PRICE OF PETROLEUM AS FIXED BY THE OPEC COUNTRIES AND ON THE OTHER HAND THE PRICE OF ESSENTIAL INDUSTRIAL AND OTHER SCARCE COMMODITIES WHICH HAD ADMITTEDLY BEEN INCREASED BY INFLATION. SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD MADE VERY CLEAR THE U.S. DESIRE FOR A MULTILATER APPROACH AND I EXPRESSED THE PERSONAL HOPE THAT THROUGH SUCH MULTILATERAL CONSULTATION SOME MODUS VIVENDI COULD BE WORKED OUT BETWEEN THE OIL PRODUCING COUNTRIES AND THE CONSUMERS, THE INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS AND THE LDC'S

4. AT THIS POINT THE PRESIDENT INTERJECTED THAT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCH A MUTUAL ADJUSTMENT HAD PRESENTED ITSELF AT THE LAST SPECIAL SESSION OF UNGA AND THAT HE WAS DISAPPOINTED THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD TAKEN A POSITION OF CONFRONTATION WITH THE OTHER COUNTRIES REPRESENTED AT THAT MEETING.

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LIMDIS

5. SO FAR AS BILATERAL RELATIONS IN PETROLEUM BETWEEN THE US AND VENEZUELA WERE CONCERNED, PRESIDENT PEREZ SAID THAT IF HE FOLLOWED THE TRUE NATIONAL INTEREST HE SHOULD CUT PETROLEUM PRODUCTION BY HALF. IT WOULD BE BETTER TO LEAVE OIL IN THE SAFE BANK OF THE EARTH FOR THE BENEFIT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS THAN TO

DEplete THE NATIONAL RESOURCES TOO QUICKLY. HOWEVER, HE WAS ALSO MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT VENEZUELA HAD COMMITMENTS AND PARTICULARLY TO THE UNITED STATES. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON THAT HE HAD RESISTED THE TEMPTATION DRASTICALLY TO CURTAIL PRODUCTION AND HAD GIVEN ORDERS FOR THE INDUSTRY TO CONTINUE TO MEET VENEZUELA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS EVEN THOUGH A COURSE OF CONSERVATION WOULD HAVE BEEN THE WISEST POLICY. RE RECENT REDUCTION IN PRODUCTION OF BETWEEN 200,000 AND 300,000 B/D, THIS WAS DUE TO MEASURES OF CONSERVATION WITH WHICH EVEN DOLPH, PRESIDENT OF CREOLE, AGREED WERE TECHNICALLY SOUND AND ADVISABLE.

6. I INQUIRED WHETHER, WITH VENEZUELA'S IMMENSE INCREMENT IN NATIONAL INCOME DERIVED FROM HIGHER OIL PRICES, IT COULD NOT OF ITS OWN ACCOUNT INITIATE EXPLORATION FOR NEW SOURCES OF CONVENTIONAL OIL. THE PRESIDENT DID NOT ANSWER DIRECTLY, BUT IN RESPONSE TO MY OBSERVATION THAT SURELY OIL MUST BE FOUND ON THE CONTINENTAL SHELF
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UNDER THE GULF OF VENZUELA SAID THAT HE DEEPLY REGRETTEED THAT AN AGREEMENT HAD NOT BEEN REACHED WITH COLOMBIA BY THE CALDERA GOVERNMENT. HE SAID IN FACT AN AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE HAD BEEN ARRIVED AT BUT THAT FOR REASONS OF DOMESTIC POLITICS CALDERA HAD REFUSED TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY. PEREZ SEEMED HOPEFUL, HOWEVER, THAT WITH THE COMING INTO OFFICE OF THE NEW COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT, THE TWO COUNTRIES COULD IN FACT REACH AN AGREEMENT. HE RECOGNIZED THE SENSITIVITY OF THIS ISSUE AND FRANKLY SAID THAT THE VENEZUELAN PSYCHOSIS OF CONSTANTLY BEING OUTDONE BY THE COLOMBIANS IN INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATIONS WAS IN REALITY THE VENEZUELAN'S OWN FAULT AS THEY HAD MISSED MANY OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PAST. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT IN DEALING WITH THE QUESTION OF AN ARRANGEMENT WITH COLUMBIA OVER THE GULF OF VENEZUELA, THERE WERE "PRIMITIVE" ELEMENTS IN THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE WHO ASSUMED MORE CHAUVINISTIC ATTITUDES WHICH INCREASED IN VIRULENCE IN PROPORTION TO THE LOWER THE STRATA OF POPULATION. HE ADDED ALSO THERE WERE ELEMENTS IN THE MILITARY WHO TOOK A "SUPERPATRIOTIC" VIEW AND THAT THESE ATTITUDES HAD TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN REACHING AN ULTIMATE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM WITH COLOMBIA.

7. REGARDING CONVERSATIONS WITH THE AMERICAN OIL COMPANIES, THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THESE WERE GOING AHEAD BUT THAT HE THOUGHT EVENTUAL SOLUTIONS RE PETROLEUM WOULD AWAIT A SETTLEMENT OF THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE IRON MINES. HE THOUGHT THIS WAS A SIMPLER PROBLEM AND ONE WHICH COULD BE WORKED OUT ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT INDICATE ANY DETAILS. I SAID WE WERE FULLY IN AGREEMENT WITH THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT'S POSITION THAT VENEZUELAN IRON ORE SHOULD BE GIVEN FIRST PRIORITY FOR THE VENEZUELAN STEEL INDUSTRY. HOWEVER, THERE WAS CLEARLY AT PRESENT AN EXCESS CAPACITY OF IRON ORE PRODUCTION AND WE HOPED THAT WHILE THE NEW STEEL INDUSTRY WAS BEING CREATED THERE WOULD CONTINUE

TO BE SUBSTANTIAL EXPORT OF ORE TO THE UNITED STATES. I ADDED MY PRIVATE HOPE THAT IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE U.S. STEEL COMPNIES IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR SOME ARRANGEMENT TO BE MADE WHEREBY THEY COULD ASSIST VENEZUELA THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFER IN ESTABLISHING THE GREAT NEW STEEL INDUSTRY WHICH PRESIDENT PEREZ HAD PROCLAIMED AS ONE OF HIS GOALS.

8. REVERTING TO THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE OIL COMPANIES, PEREZ EXPRESSED SATISFACTION AT HIS CONVERSATION LAST EVENING WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF MOBIL OIL, MR. RAWLEIGH WARNER,
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WHOM HE CHARACTERIZED AS A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT MAN. AMONG THE POSSIBILITIES THEY HAD DISCUSSED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MINISTER OF MINES AND HYDROCARBONS WAS A FORMULA WHEREBY PERHAPS THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTRACT FOR THE TECHNICAL FACILITIES AND ADVICE (HE USED THE WORD "ASESORES") OF FOREIGN OIL COMPANIES AND LIKEWISE REACH AGREEMTN AS TO VENEZUELAN PARTICIPATION IN MARKETING ARRANGEMENTS. HE SEEMED SURPRISED THAT I OBSERVED THAT THUS FAR ONLY TWO COMPANIES--CREOLE AND SHELL--HAD BEEN INCLUDED IN THE PRELIMINARY CONVERSATIONS WITH MINISTER OF MINES VALENTIN HERNANDEZ AND MINISTER OF STATE PEREZ GUERRERO. I SAID THAT THE OTHER, SMALLER, AMERICAN COMPANIES WERE APPREHENSIVE AND FELT LEFT OUTSIDE THE INNER CIRCLE. PEREZ THANKED ME FOR BRINGING THIS TO HIS ATTENTION AND SAID THAT HE WOULD GIVE INSTRUCTIONS THAT THE LESSER COMPANIES LIKEWISE BE INCLUDED.

9. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE DOUBTED VERY MUCH IF FINAL ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE MADE RE THE FUTURE NATIONALIZATION OF PETROLEUM WITHIN THE PRESENT CALENDAR YEAR. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, "I THINK THIS MUST BE BROUGHT TO A HEAD NO LATER THAN NEXT YEAR BECAUSE OTHERWISE WE SHALL BE APPROACHING THE ELECTORAL CYCLE AND THE MATTER WILL ONCE MORE BECOME A POLITICAL FOOTBALL." HERE HE CRITIZED BY OVERT IMPLICATION THE ATTITUDE OF CALDERA AND THE COPEI PARTY AS SEEKING TO GAIN PETTY POLITICAL ADVANTAGE BY OPPOSING MEASURES WHICH WERE IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST.

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LIMDIS

II.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. PRESIDENT PEREZ EXPRESSED GREAT CONCERN OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN ARGENTINA AND ASKED MY OPINION AS TO WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IN THAT COUNTRY. I TOLD HIM THE STORY OF MY EXPERIENCE MANY YEARS AGO WHEN RIDING WITH A FOREST GUARD IN THE NATIONAL PART OF BARILICHE. THIS MAN HAD SAID, "SEÑOR EMBAJADOR, ON THE DAY WHEN WE STOP SPEAKING 'THAT COUNTRY' AND TALK ABOUT 'OUR COUNTRY' THEN WE SHALL BE A REAL ARGENTINA."

2. PEREZ SAID HE WAS GREATLY CONCERNED LEST BOTH IN ARGENTIAN AND CHILE (HERE HE CLEARLY WAS REFERRING TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A MILITARY TAKEOVER IN BUENOS AIRES) THERE WOULD BE CONDITIONS APPROACHING ANARCHY AT THE SOUTHERN EXTREMITY OF THE CONTINENT WITH DANGERS TO THE ENTIRE HEMISPHERE WHICH SHOULD BE APPARENT TO ALL.

3. COMING TO COUNTRIES CLOSER TO HOME, THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT VENEZUELA WAS USING SOME OF ITS NEW-FOUND WEALTH TO
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HELP LESS FORTUNATE COUNTRIES. HE SAID ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO HE HAD DIRECTED THE GRANT OF \$15 MILLION INTEREST-FREE LOAN TO GUYANA, REPAYABLE IN 20 YEARS. THIS IN EFFECT AMOUNTED TO A GIFT. SIMILARLY, HE WAS MAKING AVAILABLE \$5 MILLION TO COSTA RICA; AND PLANNED TO FINANCE IN HONDURAS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PAPER AND PULP INDUSTRY. HE AGREED WITH ME THAT PROBABLY THIS WAS ONE OF FEW INSTANCES IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY OF ONE LATIN

GOVERNMENT HELPING OTHERS WITH MONETARY AID.

4. THE PRESIDENT DEPLORED WHAT HE TERMED VENEZUELA'S "UNNECESSARY" RECOGNITION OF MAINLAND CHINA. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN A FAIT ACCOMPLI BY PRESIDENT CALDERA, WHO HAD ALREADY WHILE STILL IN OFFICE PLEDGED TO PEKING THAT VENEZUELA WOULD OPEN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THAT GOVERNMENT. PEREZ HAD RELUCTANTLY GONE ALONG WITH CALDERA'S PROMISE ALTHOUGH IT WAS PATENT THAT CALDERA HAD MADE THAT ARRANGEMENT SOLELY FOR CONSIDERATIONS OF DOMESTIC POLITICS DURING THE RECENT ELECTIONS. ON THIS I MADE NO COMMENT.

5. THE PRESIDENT DID SAY, HOWEVER, THAT I SHOULD HAVE NOTED A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE AS BETWEEN THE CALDERA ADMINISTRATION AND HIS OWN SO FAR AS IT CONCERNED THE UNITED STATES. IT WAS CLEAR THAT CALDERA HAD BEEN DELIBERATELY ANTI-AMERICAN BUT HE WISHED TO ASSURE ME OF HIS STEADFAST FRIENDSHIP FOR THE UNITED STATES AND FOR HIS DESIRE FOR GOOD RELATIONS. THEREFORE, HE EARNESTLY HOPED THAT WE COULD STOP "SNIPING" AT VENEZUELA BECAUSE EACH SUCH EPISODE (AND HERE HE HAD IN MIND THE BENNETT TESTIMONY AND PROBABLY OUR OWN DEMARCHES WITH REGARD TO HIGH OIL PRICES) THERE WERE PROVOKED VIOLENT PUBLIC REACTIONS AND PEOPLE ON BOTH SIDES, IN VENEZUELA AND THE UNITED STATES, SAID THING WHICH UNDER CALMER CONDITONS THEY WOULD NOT HAVE UTTERED AND WHICH LATER THEY WOULD REGRET.

6. THROUGHOUT THE INTERVIEW PRESIDENT PEREZ WAS MOST CORDIAL AND RECALLED THAT WE HAD BEEN PERSONAL FRIENDS EVER SINCE I ARRIVED HERE. HE SAID THAT DESPITE SOME OF THE THINGS I WAS OBLIGED TO SAY, HE REGARDED ME AS A TRUE FRIEND OF VENEZUELA. I REPLIED THAT I CONSTANTLY ENDEAVORED TO SEPARATE OUT OUR MAIN MUTUAL INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES FROM MINUTIAE, THAT I REALIZED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM CENTERED UPON MAKING A BETTER, DEMOCRATIC VENEZUELA BUT HAD NO ANTI-FOREIGN OR ANTI-U.S. BIAS, AND THAT I COULD PREDICT THAT WITH THE SUCCESS OF HIS PROGRAM HE WOULD

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GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS THE GREATEST PRESIDENT VENEZUELA HAD PRODUCED. IN THANKING ME IT WAS CLEAR THAT CAROLS ANDRES AGREED. MCCLINTOCK

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